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50 Cent: Sway Tells The Story Behind The Interview

Sway meets the man of the hour in Miami, and gets the real story.
By MTV News Staff
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"Wow!" is the best way to describe how the entire music industry and country is on this guy's jock.

I was a fan of 50 Cent before Eminem and Dre signed him, before "Wanksta" became a street anthem. What I admire most about 50 is his work ethic and strategic ways of marketing himself. The man is not lazy, and somewhere along his journey he figured out a way to make "bad" look "good."

When he made records in the late '90s like "Rowdy, Rowdy" and "How to Rob," his pictures of thug life and street struggles were alarming. Describing different ways to burglarize some of the most successful artists of the time probably bought him more trouble than it did popularity, but it did establish him as a clever rapper.

This was the first step on his road to credibility. The ideology behind those records represented the common man on the streets, and that made him appear to be accessible. When he was shot nine times, by surviving, that made him appear to be invincible. Skills on the mic, accessibility, credibility and invincibility are ingredients that can make a rap icon, hence we have 50 Cent.

I was just returning from one of the most disappointing Super Bowls ever (I was born in Oakland, what do you expect) when I was informed that I had to travel to Miami to interview 50 Cent. I was looking forward to doing it because he is easily the most anticipated artist since Tupac and Biggie. In my last interviews with the two fallen icons, I had a chance to discover the men behind the images, and I was hoping for the same result with 50.

When we arrived in Miami I had a few hours to rest and prepare. In that time I reflected on the interview that I did with Tupac (which unfortunately ended up being his last) just a few months before his untimely demise. 50 reminded me of Tupac because his "Give a F---" factor was less than zero. He speaks openly against his adversaries, he speaks out against the law, he had been shot and survived, the streets are in awe of him, he is controversial, he's a sex symbol and he's a businessman. So I figured that I would approach him the same way that I did Pac, and that is being straight-ahead with my line of questioning.

Around 8 p.m. we finally arrived at the Hit Factory Studios to do the interview, but it looked more like a military compound because the parking lot was filled with at least 15 of Queens' finest street soldiers indulging in a friendly game of basketball. 50's group, the G-Unit, was definitely alive and prepared for whatever ... and I do mean whatever. As soon as I got there I had a chance to review the album in a parked car in the lot. My immediate response was, "*Damn* this record is hardcore," and I will admit that the lyrical content "chilled" me a little bit. I believed just about everything that the man wrote, and I haven't felt like this about "murder rap" since Tupac and Biggie. Don't get me wrong, he's not on their level -- at least not yet. After I finished listening to the album I walked through the parking lot and took pride in the fact that the G-Unit gave me 'daps' of respect, plus these dudes were very friendly and secure, no fake "ice-grills."

50 Cent was waiting for me in a room in the back of the studio that was staged with candles and yellow caution tape for the street effect ... we eventually 'deaded' the tape as it was too dramatic.

We greeted each other with a handshake and a half-shoulder hug and immediately started to smile at each other. My smile meant "Congratulations, you are truly beating the system," and his smile seemed to mean "I got 'em all, just as planned." I informed 50 and his management that my intent was not to exploit his feuds but to expose his person. They all appeared to be excited and cooperative so we proceeded.

I'm not going to tell you the whole interview because I want to encourage you to watch the special "All Eyes On: 50 Cent" on MTV. I will let you know that we discussed very openly his childhood, how he found out about his mother's murder, high school, his fears, death, Tupac, Ja Rule, girls, his son and more.

We all agreed to meet at 50's hotel later that night and we were going to follow him to a club performance. Even though I heard all the lyrics about guns, read about his run-ins with the law and actually viewed the bullet holes in his body, I never anticipated riding with 50 to his concert in a Level 4 security bulletproof/bombproof Jeep Cherokee. He described the at least 4-inch-thick windows and the steel plate underneath the car. He told me that at point-blank range a 9mm handgun wouldn't even scratch the windows. He even told me that originally he was going to purchase a Level 4 security Mercedes until the original owner was murdered. We finally arrived at the club, and I will admit that I never felt safer in a car.

It took 50's security about 25 minutes to clear a secure path for him to walk through and go straight to the stage. Fans were spilling over just to catch a glimpse of him. As he performed the hits and undressed for the ladies the crowd maintained a volume pitch of 10.

It's funny to me how everybody from the streets to the suburbs to the corporate world are embracing America's black sheep, overlooking his murderous lyrics, his tales of drug trade, misogyny and so forth. 50 Cent is not a saint and he's being very honest about it. He's intelligent, in the streets, the law is on his ass, and now he's famous. It is so typical for "pop culture" to latch onto something that it doesn't really understand in order to appear hip, only to abandon it when the reality extends into the malls, the workplace and the bedrooms of its children. Will you turn your back when a certain reality surfaces before our country's eyes that the mentality of the biggest artist today, 50 Cent, is shared by droves of youth across the country? Just like Tupac, Ice Cube, Chuck D, Biggie and Eminem, 50 Cent will expose a dark reality. The industry exploits a dysfunctional community and consumers fantasize about it and buy it. What about working toward healing it?

Truthfully, though I like his album, I'm not a big fan of all of the lyrical content because I'm from the streets of Oakland and I've seen all of that and lived through it as well, so I don't fantasize about it. I am a fan of the man and his evolution. I would like to see all so-called "gangsta rappers" succeed because I believe that the experience that success breeds will enable them to write about a more inspirational picture of life. Hopefully this will lead their true constituents to strive for similar evolution. In the meantime, I got your back ... ALL EYES ON 50 CENT!

--[article id="1453178"]Sway Calloway[/article]

Be sure to check out our full-length feature on 50 Cent, [article id="1469960"]"50 Cent: Money To Burn"[/article].